



STATE OF MAINE  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
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AUGUSTA, ME 04333-0023

JANET T. MILLS  
GOVERNOR

A. PENDER MAKIN  
COMMISSIONER

March 24, 2021

Senator Joseph Rafferty, Co-chair  
Representative Michael Brennan, Co-chair  
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Joint Committee,

LD 655, An Act To Require at Least a 30-minute Lunch Period for Students seeks to have a minimum lunch period time for Maine students. Daily food service staff statewide work diligently to produce nutritious high-quality meals for Maine students. Studies show that consistently providing nutritious meals to students positively impacts their achievement. It is imperative that students are provided enough time to consume their balanced meals while at school. A [2010 study](#) with a focus on high school students' satisfaction with the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) revealed that students would skip lunch altogether if not given enough time to eat.

During a weekly Child Nutrition Director call, the Department's Child Nutrition team posed the following question: What is your shortest lunch period? Responses were compiled based on districts. There are 216 districts participating in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and 109 participants responded. Times ranged from 15 minutes to 50 minutes. In summary, 38% had 20-minute lunch periods, 40% had 25-minute lunch periods and 17% reported 30-minute lunch periods. Time varied between grades spans within many schools. Federal guidelines found in 7 CFR 210.10 (k) (2) require "*Adequate lunch periods*. FNS encourages schools to provide sufficient lunch periods that are long enough to give all students adequate time to be served and to eat their lunches."

The term "lunch period" is not defined within federal guidance. As a result, it is unclear how to measure or monitor lunch periods. If the goal is to consistently ensure adequate time to consume a meal, then states may consider defining "lunch period" by providing definitions and expectations for time eating and/or seat time. Child Nutrition Directors statewide have provided mixed feedback regarding their desire to have the term defined.

The implementation of LD 655 may require some districts to incur additional costs by altering daily and master schedules, increasing staffing for student supervision, and expanding work hours for child nutrition professionals. Additional costs may also be incurred by the Department for increased training, communication, tracking, and monitoring to meet the requirements of the bill.

The Department's Child Nutrition team is committed to fighting hunger in every Maine community by providing child nutrition professionals with the knowledge, support, and training

required to consistently serve Maine's students nutritious meals before, during, and after-school. When students do not participate in the breakfast and lunch program, consequences may include: federal funding loss, increased challenges for students to remain focused on learning, increased waste, disciplinary concerns, and more visits to the nurse. The Department supports the intent of the bill and will continue to provide information and technical support to district leaders.

The Department looks forward to continued conversations around LD 655 and will be happy to answer any questions during the work session.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

*Walter Beesley*

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Walter Beesley

Child Nutrition Director

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